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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1763
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3542
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0930
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1461
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0339

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000746

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [EZ](#) [RU](#) [IR](#) [PL](#) [CZ](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN'S REACTION TO MISSILE DEFENSE ALL ABOUT
GABALA

REF: A. SECSTATE 47392

[1](#)B. BAKU 595

[1](#)C. SECSTATE 96526

Classified By: Charge Donald Lu, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Charge briefed Foreign Minister Mammadyarov on the United States' new approach to missile defense in Europe on September 18. The Minister focused on the relevance of Gabala radar station in the new architecture, and maintained the line the GOAJ has followed since the missile defense issue emerged in 2007: they are willing to consider U.S.-Russia joint use of the facility, but want to be informed every step of the way (Reftels A, B). The news of the Administration's decisions on European missile defense has played prominently in Baku. Media and chattering-class reactions vary. The issue is generally viewed through the prism of U.S.-Russian relations, with much commentary suggesting that Russia gained from the U.S. decision, but media attention focused more heavily on implications for Gabala. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Charge briefed Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov using Reftel C talking points. Mammadyarov immediately steered the discussion to Gabala. Charge explained that while the United States was open to considering cooperation with Russia at the Gabala (Azerbaijan) and/or Armavir (Krasnodar, Russia) bases; there is no agreement between the U.S. and Russia in this regard, and the United States would keep Azerbaijan apprised of any steps taken with respect to Gabala. Mammadyarov appreciated this, adding that he had recently made the point to Russian FM Lavrov that Azerbaijan needs to be part of that conversation. Mammadyarov then mentioned that discussion of Gabala also had to take into account the expiry of the Russian lease in September 2012 (Note: The President and the Foreign and Defense Ministers have not hesitated to tell us of their dissatisfaction with the terms of the current lease. End Note.) The Foreign Minister also noted that his government appreciates the U.S. recognition of the threat posed to Iran's neighbors of its short and medium-range missiles. He added that Azerbaijan is deeply interested in purchasing sensors and defensive weapons to protect itself from ballistic missile attack, saying "(w)e are ready to sign a check."

¶3. (SBU) Azerbaijani press reaction was arrayed along the usual spectrum from neutral to conspiratorial. Official media reported the story by quoting wire service reports from Washington. Some opposition papers portrayed the U.S. policy shift as a betrayal of the Czech Republic and Poland. More informed commentary focused on the implications for the Gabala radar station, with noted political scientist Rasim Musabeyov offering the most balanced commentary, speculating that the radar might be an avenue for cooperation but opining further that the question is far from decided. Political scientist Vafa Guluzade, famous for his Russophobic views, said that the U.S. policy shift was likely the result of a promise by President Obama to President Medvedev at the Moscow summit in July.

¶4. (C) Comment: While Azerbaijan is a peripheral (and hypothetical) player in missile defense at this stage, it is important to note that expectations are high here that the Gabala station is in play in U.S. missile defense plans. The GOAJ would likely jump at the chance to be part of the architecture, especially if it is done in the context of cooperation with Russia. However, the issue is complicated by the apparent gap in understanding here that use of Gabala would have more to do with the political symbolism of U.S.-Russian cooperation than the radar station's capabilities on the one hand, and further because the GOAJ will not be able to resist the urge to use U.S. interest in the site as leverage on the Russians as they negotiate the renewal of Moscow's lease, which will expire in September 2012. The Azerbaijanis also have big hopes for purchases of U.S. weapons, and may see U.S. interest in Gabala as a lever

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for achieving those aims. Expectation management will be key here. End Comment.
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